

To whom it may concern,

Television and the public sphere can be an important element of a successful democracy. It is a place for individuals to offer points of view that challenge each other and subject our country's decision-making process to a true democratic test of argument. However, there is currently a situation involving Sinclair Broadcasting which threatens this democratic character of the public sphere and highlights the need for greater FCC regulation.

We all recognize the dangers of a "state-controlled" media and it has consistently been the policy of the US and FCC to provide protection against this sort of central administrative control. There is the risk, however, of a different sort of administrative control by way of market forces if the FCC doesn't intervene.

Let me be clear, this is not a partisan sort of attack on corporations as such, but rather a concern that fora for democratic arguments might become so intermingled with market concerns that we lose hold of the intent of the media -- as a place for the voice of the people in a democratic exchange.

A small slip can lead to a cycle of democratic disempowerment, and I believe that we are seeing a slip about to occur. For example, a consolidated media group, such as Sinclair Broadcasting, gains power to squelch those democratic voices that should be on an equal argumentative footing with it when the FCC policies establish barriers to entry for non-corporate democratic voices and encourages consolidation by failing to regulate. Now in all fairness, this question of whether FCC policies do encourage problems or not is a contestable question which should be taken up democratically. For many voters this question is posed and argued in the form of the Presidential Election since the FCC is an executive agency and presidential and congressional influence has determined the direction of FCC policy over the years. The concern becomes that if a media group is allowed to assert an influence for which there is no reciprocal public voice in the debate over whether it should be able to assert such an influence, then there is only a risk that the voice of the public will lose to the voices of the market and its media conglomerates. This risk is absolute since once the cycle starts, it will be nearly impossible for the public to express their voice on equal footing in the public sphere since market sector control is the goal of media conglomeration, and that's when civil unrest becomes a more likely risk to the government.

In this case, I'm discussing specifically Sinclair's decision to have their stations air a documentary which promotes a clearly anti-Kerry message only days before the election. This is a case where past failures of the FCC to intervene in media conglomeration can be rectified before all public voices are lost. We need to strengthen media ownership rules, not weaken them. We need to

ensure that the license renewal process involves more than a returned postcard. We need to be vigilant as the protectors of democracy to allow everyone the opportunity to offer their arguments. I ask that the FCC intervene to stop Sinclair and restrict this practice around election time in the future. I also ask that the FCC restrict media conglomeration in its licensing practices.

Thank You